CALDEY PAPERS. No. 1.

Spiritual Healing.

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PUBLISHED AT CALDEY ABBEY, TENBY,
SOUTH WALES.
1909.

Spiritual Healing.

THE present generation has witnessed certain phenomena in the region of Bodily Healing, which demand the attention of students and teachers of religion, not only as matters of intense human interest, but also specifically on the ground that many of them are attributed to the power of Prayer and the action of our Lord Jesus Christ in answer to Prayer. A very large number of people have, undoubtedly, been cured of both organic and functional diseases apart from the use of the ordinary methods employed by the medical and surgical professions. A recent report of the work of a well-known Spiritual Healer includes cases of cure from cancer of the bowel, rupture, rheumatoid arthritis, locomotor ataxy, stammering, valvular heart trouble, and colitis, together with a case which bore apparent marks of demoniac possession, and one of habitual drunkenness, in which there were also signs of possession.

The people who have been able to exercise such Healing give different accounts of their power. Some of them find the explanation of that power in physical characteristics within themselves, by which they are able to influence the mind of the sufferer and strengthen it to cast off disease. These are generally spoken of as Mental Healers, and the method they employ is called "Suggestion." The term "Spiritual Healer," on the other hand, is applied to those who look upon the effects which they are able to produce as the result of Prayer and the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ to heal. Some of these lay exclusive stress upon the spiritual aspect of their action; others also draw attention to the idea that they have physical powers within them, which they consider to be the instrument which the Saviour makes use of for His work of compassionate love.

The ministration of the Clergy to the sick has been

widely influenced of late by the idea that it is likely that our Lord should will now to exercise amongst His people the power of Healing which He manifested during the three years of His ministry in Galilee and Judea. They have felt that, if He wills to work such Healing, the Church's ancient form of Sacramental Unction is a rite the use of which He will most certainly bless for this purpose. They have come to feel that they have no right to take it for granted that any particular sickness is necessarily the will of God for the patient, but that it may be His will that the patient should rise up to conquer it in and with Christ. They have brought Prayer and the ministration of Sacramental Grace to bear on the disease with a view to freeing the patient for the work of life to which God may call him.

There are Priests who have powers of Healing, such as those which the Lay Spiritual Healers find in themselves, but the ordinary Priest who administers Sacraments with a view to Healing has no such power; he finds the power in the Sacrament itself, or rather in the Person of Christ present in the Sacrament with His Church according to His promise.

It would be well to include under the term "Spiritual Healing" the work of all those who believe that they are the means of bringing our Lord into contact with the patient, that His life may flow out to them for Healing; and under "Mental Healing" the work of those whose chief concern is with certain natural powers within themselves which have effect in the arrest or conquest of disease.

A Mental Healer may be one who believes earnestly in Prayer and Sacraments; a Spiritual Healer may believe that he is endowed with natural powers which our Lord makes use of for Healing; only they take a different view of their calling.

It is clear that there is great affinity between the work of a Spiritual Healer and that of the Ministers of the Church. One important thing the Church has to do is to determine whether this affinity is of such a nature that the Church can and should accept the Ministry of the Spiritual Healers, and treat it as one of her ordinary ministrations, in addition to the use of Sacramental Unction. Our Fathers in God at the Lambeth Conference were in great sympathy with the work of the Spiritual Healer, but felt that the time had not yet arrived when they could formally sanction the work of any one Healer as part of the Church's system, by conferring Minor Orders or any preliminary recognition upon him.

The status of the Spiritual Healer in the Church of Christ of the present age is therefore a matter which we wait to see

brought out clearly in answer to the earnest prayer and study of those who have been brought in contact with the movement. One great and most important contribution to the inquiry is the examination of the theological basis on which the whole idea of Spiritual and Sacramental Healing rests. We will now attempt to make a contribution to clear thought upon that branch of the subject.

We may start from our knowledge that disease and death are the result of sin being in the world, and are not part of God's primary purpose for man. We may affirm this of disease in the same sense in which we should affirm that sin is not part of God's primary purpose for man.

Secondly, we find in nature, apart from special gifts of grace, an intention to heal disease. Nature brings up her forces to cicatrise and to heal a wound. Nature has marvellous provisions for the fresh junction of bones which have been broken. Natural food and fresh air restore strength with the result of conquering disease. Natural herbs and drugs have power to alleviate and to cure. Natural faith in physical remedies and the Doctor's skill greatly assist the effectual working of such remedies.

The question then comes, Does the revelation of Life and Grace through Jesus Christ leave the matter of Bodily Healing where it was? or does our Lord manifest Himself as the Saviour of the body from disease as well as of the soul from sin? Is the sphere of Grace a sphere in which we may look for special power of bodily Healing, including and yet transcending the ordinary natural means?

There is great cause for thinking so in the revelation which God has given of the Christ.

If we consider, first, whether the Jews of our Lord's time had been led to expect a Messiah who should be a Healer of the bodies of men, it seems as if the answer is not quite clear. The passages in Isaiah which may have this meaning are also capable of being applied to spiritual diseases. The blindness which is spoken of seems to have at any rate its primary reference to blindness of the soul. Yet, that a physical interpretation was given to such passages by some in the early Church is seen by the words of S. Matthew, who, after recounting a number of our Lord's works of Healing, says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the Prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." We certainly cannot wonder at the disciples making such an interpretation, because there can be no doubt that our Lord willed to mark His work amongst men very strongly indeed

with the character of Healing. No one can rise from the study of the Gospels without the idea that He willed to leave men with this impression of His Ministry. We feel, also, that the character manifested in the Gospel was meant to be the manifestation of what He is to all time. It seems impossible to think that He showed Himself then as the Healer of bodies, but wishes us to think of Him exclusively as the Healer of souls now. He says no word to make us think that He willed to put off this character, when He should be with us even unto the end of the world through the coming of God the Holy Ghost in the Church. If He had willed to do so, we can hardly think that He would have sent His Apostles out to heal. In the forefront of His commission to them comes first the command to preach the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Then comes, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils." In this connection it is interesting to notice that the Apostles made use of oil to anoint the sick with a view to Healing. S. Mark tells us that they "anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them."

That our Lord willed His Apostles after the coming of the Kingdom on the first Whitsunday to continue the practice of Healing, we learn from the frank assurance with which they healed in the Name of Christ. It seems the most natural thing in the world that the Name of Jesus through faith in His Name should be the means of restoring to perfect soundness the lame man healed by S. Peter and S. John. The other works of Healing in the Acts bear the same mark of its being considered a natural result of our Lord's work of love for man that His Church should minister the blessing of health to those capable of receiving it. If the last verses of S. Mark's Gospel are not part of the original writing, at any rate they express a very early belief that our Lord gave an explicit commission to heal just before His Ascension.

It did not apparently come into the mind of the Church for many centuries that the power to heal would be withdrawn. The Fathers and Historians of the first five centuries testify to the power of the Church to heal by faith. Irenæus speaks of frequent cases in which, in answer to the prayer and fasting of a whole Church, the spirit has even returned to the dead body. Eusebius attributes the falling off of such gifts in his time to the Churches being unworthy of them. Is it not the case that here and there through the ages of the Christian era we hear of *Gifts of Healing* being exercised, as well as of

Healing apart from such Gifts in answer to Prayer and through the Sacraments.

It would be very difficult for a man of faith to think that the manifestation of such Healing, which has been so marked in divers portions and in divers manners in the present age, has no message to bring to the Church that she has an inheritance, which she has neglected, an old thing which she is bound to bring out of her treasures.

The facts mentioned do not seem to bear out the contention urged by some that the Christ's power of Healing is all carried out in the art of the physician and the surgeon. Truly we claim their work as most Christian, and urge that it should be used with prayer and Sacraments, as we love to read in the First Lesson for S. Luke's Day; yet we feel and know that there are many diseases which will not give way to their remedies. May we not rightly believe that within the sphere of grace there are blessings to be obtained beyond any physical means? "If ye had faith, ye should remove mountains." "Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "It was by His works of Healing, almost in the forefront of His work, that our Lord taught us to estimate the power of His Presence with us now. Our present faith in our Lord is a true estimate of those powers of His which are hidden from the view of the unbeliever." *(Christus Futurus.)*

In this spirit we ask that all Healing should be recognized as a department of human life, over which the Incarnate Son of God presides by the appointment of God. A Doctor was testifying lately to his own experience of the need of spiritual means in his work. He said, "I have had two wonderful answers to prayer lately about patients, who to my professional mind were dying." In one case he made his Communion with special intention for the patient; in an hour or two there was a change for the better. Another time he simply went into the Church and prayed for the patient with like result.

We ask that the wonderful powers of Mental Healing should be used in the same spirit. No one can doubt the power of the patient's mind to lead towards physical cure. A woman was standing over a kettle, which suddenly emitted scalding steam. She felt fearful pain, and the usual result of such a burn began. Then she withdrew within herself and set her mental power to work. The inner power radiated to the outermost part of her person; the pain departed and all mark of the accident disappeared.

Equally we cannot doubt that certain people have the power

to influence the mind of others, urging it to such mental action. The real danger comes in when this power is used in a merely physical way. Such gifts are surely meant to be used in active co-operation with Him Who alone can direct and guide them in the right way. We ask that these powers should be used in the Name of Christ. It is not enough that Christian ideas should be used as the medium of the suggestion. There can be no safety except in the genuine atmosphere of faith in Christ.

It is with great relief that we turn from the manifestation of mere natural powers to the exercise of strong faith in our Lord, in those, whose standpoint is simply and in deep reverence the belief that our Lord is, as He ever was, the Healer of soul and body, and that our bodies are the purchased possession of God, which He wills to free from all that may hinder them from their carrying out of God's purpose for them, where the atmosphere of faith is found. Our faith goes out most heartily to welcome such Healers, longs that their ministry may be kept pure and undefiled, and believes that there is a most real and permanent place for them in the life-giving grace handed down to us in the Church. At the very least they send us back to our ministry to the sick with renewed faith and hope. May it not be that sickness is not primarily a call to resignation alone, but rather a call to rise up and obtain the full measure of the victory which our Lord has promised to those who love and serve Him? Our Lord has shown us that some disease at any rate is the direct work of Satan; but apart from this, is not the call similar to that of the discovery of sin within us? That is not a call to resignation, it is a call to conquest. May it not be so with sickness? The fact that sickness is the means of a great blessing to many does not prove the contrary. Perhaps the rising up to conquer it might prove a *greater* blessing. Certainly sickness in itself is no necessary incentive to Godliness. Its primary effect is to dull the spiritual faculties, and even to provoke rebellion and doubt of God's goodness. That is not the way of grace. It cannot be grace in itself.

Can pain have any actual value in itself? Its value exists just so far as it is the expression of love. Only just so far has it its place in the Kingdom of God. Happiness and freedom from pain are a permanent condition of the complete life in Christ; pain is a temporary condition in this present life of sin.

Truly we need to be careful not to press the relief of bodily pain and sickness out of due proportion. Our Lord's works

of healing the body were subordinate to the work of healing the soul; this proportion must be always kept.

Lastly, let us remember that the bringing of a sufferer to Spiritual Healing calls for very careful preparation. First there is needed the deep and earnest thought of our Lord manifested as the Healer, and the assurance that He has willed to carry on the same work in His Church. The desire for health should be directed to the longing to serve in His Name. With the stirring up of this faith goes the deepening of repentance to meet a fresh manifestation of the love and power of the Saviour. The person should be taught how the most earnest desire for Healing may co-exist with the honest and hearty prayer, "Thy will be done." It is the person coming to the personal, loving Christ, trusting Him entirely, and able to make its request all the more strong because it is able to say, "Lord, I know that Thou knowest my desire, and wilt fulfil it. Yet, if Thou dost will to send me back to bear this as my cross, I will gladly accept that too. Anyhow I know that, in answer to my desire, Thy life-giving power will flow out upon me, bringing health and strength, even if it be not in the outward bodily healing."

There should be a sense of a *call* to come for Healing in the heart of the sick person. When the time comes for Unction or the touch of the Healer, there should be no thought but of the Presence of the Christ and the coming to Him. Afterwards there should be no thought but that His touch has been given and that grace has flowed out from Him, and this should evoke deep and constant thanksgiving.

Certainly there is no outlook of the doing away of pain and suffering on this side of the grave, but there is the outlook of the faithful finding that the grace of God in which they live includes a joyful and thankful conquest of disease. We cannot rightly ignore this movement. Let us try to keep it altogether on the right lines. It does seem that we ought to claim it as a likely manifestation of our Lord and Saviour, Who is revealed not only as the Saviour of the soul but also of the body.

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Note.—The writer wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the Book *Christus Futurus* for some of the thoughts suggested in this Paper.

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